

*A unified vision for educational opportunity,
workforce alignment, and economic vitality
across Arkansas*

FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE



PREPARED FOR THE
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

May 2026



A Letter from the President

The Arkansas State University System exists to expand opportunity, transform lives, and strengthen communities.

Across our campuses, we see education change lives. We see it in students pursuing dreams once beyond reach, faculty creating knowledge that improves lives, staff helping others overcome obstacles, and alumni whose leadership and service make Arkansas stronger.

Education not only prepares people for careers, it opens doors, strengthens families, expands possibilities, and helps communities prosper.

It is an honor to serve as President of the Arkansas State University System. I am grateful to our Board of Trustees, chancellors, faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, and partners whose dedication enables our System to serve Arkansas with distinction.

This strategic plan reflects who we are, what we value, and what guides our choices. It expresses our purpose and the future we seek.

We believe in the transformative power of education.

We believe every person deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, contribute, and succeed, regardless of circumstance or geography.

We believe excellence matters, innovation is essential, stewardship is a responsibility, and service to others gives meaning to our work.

We believe partnerships with business, industry, healthcare, government, and communities create opportunities for students, strengthen Arkansas's workforce, and improve quality of life.

We believe the ASU System draws strength from the distinct missions of our institutions and the commitment that unites them.

We believe in collaboration without conformity. We create greater value by working together while respecting what makes each campus distinct.

Most importantly, we believe in people: their potential, dignity, and capacity to make a difference. The ultimate measure of the ASU System is not what we build, but what we make possible for others.

The future will bring change, challenges, and opportunities. Yet our purpose remains constant: to serve students, advance knowledge, strengthen communities, and contribute to the prosperity and well-being of Arkansas.

As President, I will hold the System to these principles: listen closely, respect our institutions, serve our campuses, and remain accountable to the people of Arkansas. Our role is to support every institution's success and create opportunities possible only when we work together.

These values will not eliminate difficult choices. They will help us make decisions with clarity, courage, humility, and responsibility.

We are one System, strengthened by the distinct missions of our institutions and united by a common purpose.

Every student represents possibility.

Every graduate represents potential.

Every partnership strengthens a community.

Every generation we educate helps shape the future of Arkansas.

That is why we exist. That is our shared responsibility. That is our enduring purpose.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T. Shields".

Dr. Todd Shields
President, Arkansas State University System

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VISION

Through the leadership of the Board of Trustees, System President and staff, Chancellors, faculty, staff, and campus communities, the Arkansas State University System will align and support a differentiated network of institutions that expands educational opportunity, prepares career-ready graduates, advances innovation, and strengthens the economic, cultural, and social vitality of Arkansas.

MISSION

The mission of the Arkansas State University System is to facilitate and assist its institutions of higher education as they improve the educational, cultural, and economic prosperity of Arkansas through a coordinated, student-centered focus that delivers high-quality, accessible, and workforce-aligned education; fosters research, innovation, and creative activity; and strengthens communities through strategic partnerships, operational excellence, and responsible stewardship of shared resources.

The System Fulfills this Mission by:

- Promoting collaboration and alignment across campuses to maximize efficiency, access, and impact
- Developing and supporting campuses as they employ a talented, skilled, and exceptional workforce of faculty and staff
- Assisting and supporting the campuses as they develop and deliver innovative academic programs aligned with regional and statewide workforce needs
- Supporting the campuses as they leverage technology, data, and cybersecurity to enhance operations and decision-making
- Supporting and promoting guardrails among system institutions that sustain financial strength through proactive resource stewardship, assistance, facilitation, and financial guidance
- Supporting the campuses as they improve student success through holistic, equitable, and seamless educational experiences
- Assisting and supporting campuses as they engage, create, and maintain external partners to strengthen visibility, trust, and economic development

STRATEGIC PLAN TASK FORCE

Bishop Robert Rudolph Jr., Chair of the Arkansas State University System Board of Trustees, announced the selection of nine individuals to serve on the System Strategic Plan Task Force. Trustees voted March 12, 2026 to form the Task Force to help facilitate the creation of a strategic plan and define the role, scope, priorities, and work of the ASU System.

Members

Gary Harpole, Jonesboro, Board of Trustees member; Chair of the Task Force

Julie Bates, Little Rock, Chief Financial Advisor of the ASU System

Dr. Robin Myers, Mountain Home, Interim President of the ASU System

Dr. Jennifer Methvin, Beebe, Chancellor of ASU-Beebe

Dr. Todd Shields, Jonesboro, Chancellor of Arkansas State University

Dr. Trey Berry, Arkadelphia, Chancellor of Henderson State University

Dr. Calvin White Jr., Jonesboro, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, Arkansas State University

Shunqetta Cunningham, Jonesboro, Owner, KHARIS Group Consulting

Tiffany Calloway, Jonesboro, Director of Operations, Delta Population Health Institute,
NYIT College of Osteopathic Medicine at Arkansas State University

The Task Force, along with additional support of the ASU System office staff, prepared a series of recommendations and a draft document to the Board of Trustees for the new Strategic Plan. Framework for the Future is a result of their work in collaboration with multiple stakeholders from across Arkansas.

Board of Trustees



*Bishop Robert G.
Rudolph Jr.
Chair*



*Paul Rowton
Vice Chair*



*Price Gardner
Secretary*



Gary Harpole



Jerry Morgan



Carole Farmer



Heather Maxey

STRATEGIC PLAN

METHODOLOGY

Representatives of multiple constituencies from across the Arkansas State University System met by videoconference on April 21 and participated in a collaborative analysis and discussion regarding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). Additional stakeholders also participated via online submissions.

Participants submitted draft priority statements for the ASU System across seven categories and then ranked the priorities in a follow-up survey. Members of the specially appointed System Strategic Planning Task Force then reviewed a draft of the Strategic Plan as created from those prioritized rankings to present to the System Board of Trustees.

PRIORITIES

The Arkansas State University System advances seven interconnected strategic priorities.

Each priority frames a domain of coordinated action across the System and its member institutions.



OUTCOMES

Success will be measured by tangible, system-level results that reflect the impact of these priorities across all member institutions, resulting in:

- A fully aligned, high-performing system with measurable operational efficiencies
- A workforce-ready graduate pipeline meeting state and regional needs
- Improved student success metrics across all campuses
- Financially sustainable institutions with diversified revenue streams
- A recognized, trusted system brand across Arkansas and beyond

A

System Collaboration & Operational Excellence

Together we build a fully aligned system that operates as a coordinated enterprise by reducing duplication, improving efficiency, and enhancing shared services while preserving institutional strengths.

B

People, Culture & Leadership

Working across institutions, we develop strategies to attract, develop, and retain exceptional faculty and staff through competitive practices, leadership development, and a culture of engagement, innovation, and accountability.

C

Academic Innovation & Workforce Alignment

As contemporary needs change quickly, we will work collaboratively across the system to deliver relevant, flexible, and high-demand academic programs aligned with workforce needs through employer partnerships, stackable credentials, and seamless student pathways.

D

Technology, Data & Cybersecurity

We will work strategically as a system of different institutions to ensure that we modernize enterprise systems to support data-informed decision-making, operational efficiency, and strong cybersecurity while adopting and leading in emerging technologies such as AI.

E

Financial Strength & Sustainability

We will ensure long-term fiscal health through deep collaboration with ASU System institutions, early financial guidance, implementing best practices, monitoring changes and making coordinated adjustments, implementing strategic resource allocation, increasing the number and strength of our diverse revenue opportunities, facilitating operational efficiency, and coordinating disciplined financial planning.

F

Student Access, Experience & Success

We will support the institutions as they create a seamless, student-centered experience that improves access, retention, completion, and successful career outcomes.

G

External Engagement & System Advancement

We will support the institutions as they strengthen relationships with industry, government, and communities to meet local economic needs while elevating their brands, expanding economic impact across The Delta and all of Arkansas, as well as its surrounding region.

PRIORITY A

Collaboration, Alignment & Operational Efficiency

We will emphasize eliminating silos, strengthening communication, clarifying the system office's role, and creating strategic, collaborative, and successful system institutions. By expanding shared services, standardizing processes, and fostering cross-campus collaboration, the ASU System will work together to improve efficiency, reduce duplication, and enhance the student experience, while maintaining institutional flexibility, institutional identity, and a systemwide perspective.

Top Priorities

1. Establish consistent, structured communication and a strong collaborative culture across institutions, the system office, and external stakeholders to reduce silos and internal competition.
2. Clarify and formalize the system office's coordinating role, aligning system priorities with statewide goals, regional needs, and board expectations.
3. Expand and formalize communities of practice and cross-campus working groups with clear accountability to strengthen coordination and reduce burdens on smaller campuses.
4. Reduce duplication and improve efficiency through shared services, expanded shared instruction models, and systemwide operational assessments.
5. Standardize key processes, policies, and transfer pathways while preserving institutional flexibility to improve student mobility and system cohesion.



PRIORITY B

Personnel Capacity & Leadership Development

We will work to build and sustain a strong workforce across the system. Priorities include improving recruitment and retention through competitive compensation, creating clear career pathways, developing leadership, and providing institutional environments where people want to work and build careers. We will promote professional development — especially in emerging areas like technology and AI — and foster supportive workplace cultures that promote well-being, mentorship, and long-term engagement.

Top Priorities

1. Strengthen recruitment and retention through competitive, market-aligned compensation with transparent pay structures, and targeted strategies for high-demand instructional roles.
2. Build a strong talent pipeline through systemwide succession planning, welcoming and supportive onboarding, and establishing clear internal career pathways.
3. Expand professional development, including leadership training, technology/AI upskilling, and continuous workforce development.
4. Foster a supportive workplace culture through employee recognition, well-being initiatives, mental and physical health support, and mentoring-focused leadership practices.



PRIORITY C

Academic Strategy, Program Innovation & Workforce Alignment

We will help to ensure alignment between academic offerings and workforce needs. This includes promoting employer partnerships, flexible learning pathways (including stackable credentials), facilitating “on” and “off” ramps for individuals as they pursue both education and careers, and coordinated program delivery across campuses. The goal is to reduce duplication, increase access, and ensure students graduate with relevant skills. We will also emphasize career readiness through experiential learning, smooth transfer pathways, and deep collaboration and partnerships with leading industries.

Top Priorities

1. Support the alignment of academic programs and credentials with workforce demand through strengthened employer partnerships and advisory engagement.
2. Support the expansion of flexible learning pathways, including stackable credentials, short-term training, and shared faculty/instruction models to increase access and capacity.
3. Support the improvement of systemwide academic coordination by reducing duplication, leveraging shared programs, and strengthening statewide reach.
4. Support the enhancement of student career readiness through experiential learning, early pathway planning, and proactive academic innovation.
5. Support the alignment of general education and articulation policies to minimize transfer barriers and credit loss.



PRIORITY D

Enterprise Technology, Data Infrastructure & Cybersecurity

The ASU System is committed to a modern and secure system. Key outcomes include strong IT governance, integrated data systems, and enhanced cybersecurity. Standardization of enterprise platforms and expanded training will improve efficiency, while forward-looking strategies such as AI integration and lifecycle planning ensure the system remains adaptable and secure in a rapidly evolving digital environment.

Top Priorities

1. Establish clear systemwide IT governance, standards, and communication processes, including defined leadership roles.
2. Develop an integrated, secure technology ecosystem through centralized cybersecurity, improved data integration, and strengthened data governance.
3. Standardize and optimize enterprise systems (e.g., Banner), tools, and reporting with expanded training and support.
4. Leverage shared services and system purchasing power to improve efficiency and reduce costs across technology investments.
5. Implement forward-looking strategies, including systemwide AI guidance and planned technology refresh cycles.
6. Emphasize and make accessible learning paths for all employees across the ASU System to be AI and cybersecurity literate and be a leading system in the use of these tools for improved efficiency, accuracy, and improvement of all aspects of training and educating students to be successful in their careers and lives.



PRIORITY E

Financial Sustainability, Resource Allocation & Fiscal Integrity

We will ensure long-term financial health across the system by emphasizing and supporting multi-year planning aligned with enrollment and economic trends, transparent and clear resource allocation, and operational efficiencies through shared services. Additionally, we will focus on diversifying revenue streams, strengthening coordinated grant capabilities, and maintaining facilities and cost structures to support sustainable growth.

Top Priorities

1. Implement proactive, multi-year financial planning aligned with enrollment trends, demographic shifts, and inflation.
2. Improve financial transparency, consistency, and clarity involving resource allocation and shared-cost structures.
3. Maximize efficiency through shared services, strategic use of resources, and systemwide purchasing leverage.
4. Diversify revenue streams and strengthen collaborative grant development and management capabilities.
5. Ensure long-term sustainability through facilities planning, maintenance funding, and monitoring of benefit and compensation costs.



The ASU System will prioritize a seamless and holistic student experience across all campuses. Efforts include simplifying processes, improving advising and transfer pathways, and using data to support student success through early interventions. We will support campus efforts to strengthen student engagement, belonging, and career outcomes through coordinated services and programming.

Top Priorities

1. Create a seamless, systemwide student experience through simplified processes, coordinated advising, and strong transfer pathways.
2. Strengthen student success through early alert systems, data-informed interventions, and systemwide sharing of best practices.
3. Expand holistic student support, including mental health services, basic-needs support, and targeted assistance for first-generation students.
4. Enhance student engagement, belonging, and connection across campuses through programming, leadership opportunities, and peer networks.
5. Improve career outcomes through coordinated career services, workforce placement support, and aligned online learning experiences.



External Relations, Communications & Strategic Partnerships

We will strengthen the visibility, reputation, and external impact of the institutions across the ASU System as a unified brand while amplifying the efforts of each institution. This calls for a modern approach to marketing and public relations, strategically designed communication strategies, and coordinated legislative engagement. We will support the campuses in their expansion of industry partnerships, alumni engagement, and strengthened community stakeholders. We will assist in enhancing individual campus workforce alignment and economic development, along with providing consistent outreach, diligent legal recommendations, timely responses, and operational coordination, which in turn will contribute to accomplishing the goal of expanding and deepening strong collaborations across the ASU System. We feel this is critically important, as we recognize the System's role in advancing our overall community well-being and quality of life through education, research, service, healthcare collaborations, and strategic partnerships.

Top Priorities

1. Expand the brands and knowledge of the incredible opportunities found across the institutions in the ASU System. Implement modern best practices for marketing, public relations, and brand management for a coordinated and collaborative university system.
2. Strengthen coordinated legislative engagement and advocacy through strategic, district-based partnerships.
3. Support and expand strategic partnerships, including industry, employer, alumni, and grant collaborations, to ensure a strategic, sustained, and universally accessible impact across campuses.
4. Enhance external communication platforms and establish a consistent outreach cadence to improve awareness and engagement.
5. Strengthen access to legal support, foster early issue identification, and emphasize speed of delivery without compromising quality.





A unified vision for educational opportunity, workforce alignment, and economic vitality across Arkansas



ABOUT THE ASU SYSTEM

The Arkansas State University System serves almost 39,000 students annually on campuses in Arkansas and Queretaro, Mexico, and globally online.

Member Institutions

- **Arkansas State University**, a four-year Carnegie R2 research institution in Jonesboro with degree centers at ASU-Beebe, ASU-Mountain Home and ASU Mid-South in West Memphis. A-State Campus Queretaro opened in Mexico in September 2017.
- **Henderson State University** in Arkadelphia, which became the system's second four-year institution member on February 1, 2021, under Act 18 of 2021.
- **ASU-Beebe**, with additional campuses in Heber Springs and Searcy.
- **ASU-Newport**, with additional campuses in Jonesboro and Marked Tree.
- **ASU-Mountain Home**.
- **ASU Mid-South** (West Memphis).
- **ASU Three Rivers** (Malvern).

The ASU System is governed by the Board of Trustees, which consists of seven members appointed by the Governor of Arkansas.

Higher education systems have a responsibility to contribute to the economic prosperity of their respective states and reinforce a focus on offering pathways for credential completion, building talent pipelines, and engaging in partnerships to support economic development and expansion.

ASU System institutions have the resources and ability to galvanize and advance communities through innovation. We will continue to focus our effort and energy on the future to ensure the ASU System is ready to meet it and work to expand our collective impact through our constellation of higher education institutions.

The ASU System office staff, led by the System President, coordinates systemwide initiatives, facilitates shared services, and provides support to campus leadership and operations. Chancellors provide management, leadership, and oversight of their respective institutions with collaborative support from the System office for execution of the Board of Trustees plans and policies.



OFFICES AND SUPPORT SERVICES

General Counsel

The Office of General Counsel offers a central contact point for legal issues affecting all ASU System institutions, providing efficient, effective, and actionable legal review on contracts and agreements, recommending action on legal affairs, and representing the system and its institutions in legal matters.

Finance

The Office of Finance coordinates financial policies and procedures for the ASU System and manages systemwide employee benefits. The office assists with capital project financing, including coordination of bond and other finance packages with underwriters, counsel, and trustees. The office provides proactive support and facilitation to solve and prevent financial issues before they become major problems.

Internal Audit

The Office of Internal Audit assesses the effectiveness of internal controls, evaluates the accuracy of financial records, verifies compliance with standard accounting practices, government and state regulations, and system policies and procedures, and makes recommendations for improvement in these areas.

Strategic Communications & Economic Development

The Office of Strategic Communications & Economic Development facilitates system communications externally and internally and works collaboratively on statewide economic development activities. This office also fulfills public records requests for all institutions.

Strategic Research

The Office of Strategic Research facilitates system efforts to improve academic outcomes and increase efficiencies through the management and analysis of a variety of institutional data.

University Relations

The Office of University Relations organizes government-related affairs and advocates for the system and its member institutions. The office builds connections among our institutions and state and federal agencies, including the Arkansas General Assembly, Congress, and the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, as well as legislative representation in Little Rock and Washington, D.C.

Employee Benefits & Human Resources

The Office of Human Resources and Office of Employee Benefits support institutions and employees through comprehensive Human Resource services and benefits administration. This includes guidance in recruitment, employee relations, policy development, compensation, and professional development to ensure a consistent and positive employee experience across the system.



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